Monitoring Domestic Radio and Television News Broadcasts: A Useful Method for Predicting, Identifying, and Documenting Harmful Action and Intent in Africa and Elsewhere[1]

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A Concept Note

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I. Introduction

It was Alexander George, political scientist, RAND corporation researcher, and strategist, who distilled the observation from Second World War propaganda research that one of the surest indicators of an authoritarian government's intentions and future plans was the carefully crafted information it fed to its people in their language.[2] Refining studies of the broadcasts of German radio during the war, George found that Joseph Goebbels and his aides had prepared the German public for important changes in policy

[1] Frank Chalk would like to acknowledge the vital help he received at the start of his study of radio broadcasting from sociologist Kurt Jonassohn, his colleague and then co-director of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) at Concordia University, as well as the valuable research assistance provided for this paper and his current work on radio broadcasting and mass-atrocity crimes by MIGS graduate student fellow Erin Jesse and MIGS interns Maha El-Kadi, Chiara Fish, Inken Heldt, Tara Tavender, and Scarlett Trazo. The outstanding research contributions of Danielle Kelton fully justify her listing as the co-author of his work on Sudan broadcasting. Helen Scudding Sproul of the BBC Monitoring Service (Caversham Park, U.K.), fulfilled every request for data with the enthusiasm and professional élan one expects from the BBC. Any errors of fact or interpretation are Frank Chalk's alone. Portions of this chapter were originally presented at the University of Western Ontario Conference on the Crisis in Darfur, 30 October 2005, London, Ontario.

[2] Alexander George, "Prediction of Political Action by Means of Propaganda Analysis," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 20 no. 1, Special Issue in Political Communication (1956): 334–45; and *Propaganda Analysis: A Study of Inferences Made from Nazi Propaganda in World War II* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson 1959).

through anticipatory news releases and commentaries. He diagramed the relationships as follows:[3]

Situational Factor ← Elite Estimate ← Elite Expectation

← Elite Intention ← Propaganda Strategy ← Content or Policy

Directives and guidelines issued weekly and sometimes daily by Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda preceded new directions in Nazi policies and explicitly suggested stories designed to shape how the public would respond to them.[4] By these means, George argued, the Nazi elite minimized the probability of sparking a backlash before making policy changes and signaled the response it wanted to evoke among its own citizens when a prepared action was implemented. Reinforcing Alexander George's analysis, intellectual and cultural historian Jeffrey Herf's recent research in the transcripts of domestic German radio broadcasts and wall posters has shown that they provided one of the earliest and most sustained warning indicators of Hitler's intention to annihilate the Jews of Europe.[5]

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[3] George, *Propaganda Analysis*, 47.

[4] Ibid., especially Chapter 2, "A General Action Schema for Propaganda Analysis," and Chapter 11, "Prediction of an Elite's Major Actions."

[5] Jeffrey Herf, "The 'Jewish War': Goebbels and the Antisemitic Campaigns of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 19 no. 1 (2005): 51–80. Herf's research revises the conventional wisdom in the field, shaped by Hannah Arendt and others, which held that little in the German media substantially revealed the ferocity or the timing of the Nazis' actual implementation of their genocidal intentions towards the Jews of Europe. For a discussion of Arendt's early insights and change of position, see ibid., 54–5.

In "Mass-Atrocity Crimes in Darfur and the Response of Government of Sudan Media to International Pressure," distributed before the conference, I drew several practical conclusions about using GOS news broadcasts to anticipate policy directions. First, I noted:

> We have learned from our analysis of Sudanese government broadcasts that there are different patterns for the government's use of Sudan Radio, Sudan TV, and the Internet. The Government of Sudan uses Sudan TV and the websites of the Sudanese News Agency to anticipate policy changes and shape the reactions to them among Sudan's educated elite. The government acts as if it fears and respects the potential for political activism among educated Sudanese. Radio Sudan, on the other hand, addresses poor workers and farmers with little time for politics and anti-government activities. Radio Sudan rarely anticipates policy changes. Rather, it is largely a valuable tool for mobilizing participation in government-organized mass demonstrations by the poor in Sudan's largest cities, strengthening the government's claims that any attempt to insert UN troops for the enforcement of peace in Darfur would meet with massive resistance from the majority of Sudanese.

Second, I contended that:

> Unprepared by Sudan's government controlled media for the loss of revenue that would accompany any seriously implemented sharing of oil revenues with the south and the west, and schooled by the government media to regard southerners and Darfurians as fractious, disorganized, and backward interlopers in the serious work of governing Sudan, Arab northerners are unready for accommodation with

the southern and western regions of the country which contribute the bulk of its revenues. This is the surest indication that the Government of Sudan has no intention of living with signed agreements pledging greater autonomy, revenue sharing, and an integrated defence force to the leaders of dissident movements in the south and the west. The international community will ignore this evidence at its peril. The struggle of the people in southern and western Sudan for greater autonomy, a fair share of oil revenues, and security from attack has only just begun.

II. Accessing African Domestic Radio Broadcasting through BBC Monitoring: Opportunities and Obstacles

MIGS' reporting on the domestic radio and TV news broadcasts of Sudan's government operated stations was made possible by its annual subscription to the online services of BBC Monitoring (www.monitor.bbc.co.uk), which records and translates Government of Sudan (GOS) news programs and Friday night sermons from Arabic into English and posts them on its web site within twenty-four hours. The BBC Monitoring service's thorough coverage of domestic Sudanese radio and television broadcasts encouraged us to launch a pilot project expanding our reporting to six other countries—the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe—in our view, sites of current and/or future conflicts likely to eventuate in crimes against humanity. Starting in mid-July 2008, student interns from Concordia and McGill universities have been posting their concise summaries of African government radio and TV news broadcasts on the MIGS web site. (See: http://migs.concordia.ca/)

This exciting project, staffed by enthusiastic young "country desk officers," a term I borrowed from David Crane, has turned into a learning experience for all. The basic premise of the expanded pilot project was that the BBC's coverage of Sudan accurately reflected its monitoring work for all of Africa. This premise proved to be a perfect example of sampling error. In reality, BBC Monitoring's coverage of Africa is strikingly thin, but its Sudan coverage is a notable exception to this rule. BBC Monitoring's stakeholders, primarily the Cabinet Office, advised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Defence Intelligence Staff, and other British intelligence agencies, actually regard almost all of Africa as unworthy of serious coverage.[6]

BBC's broadcast surveillance operations for 2008-2009 are largely driven by a detailed set of priorities negotiated between BBC Monitoring and its principle government masters. Level One countries, those warranting the highest level of monitoring, are the countries of the Middle East plus Afghanistan, China, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan and Russia. We now understand that the BBC's excellent coverage of Sudan results from the serendipitous classification of Sudan, the largest country in Africa, as part of the Middle East, the British Government's first priority.[7]

The Priority Two countries in BBC Monitoring's hierarchical pyramid are Argentina, Belarus, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR), India, Indonesia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the countries of the Caucuses, Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa. In its report for 2007-2008, BBC announced that it had elevated five African countries—Ghana, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe—from Priority

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[6] BBC Monitoring, *A Year in Review: The World in Its Own Words, 2007-2008*, p. 6. Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://www.monitor.bbc.co.uk/review08.pdf

[7] Ibid.

Three to Priority Two, but by any measure the actual coverage of government news broadcasts in these African countries remains poor. Priority Three countries—those in the rest of Africa, Europe, Latin America, and Asia Pacific—receive even worse coverage. BBC Monitoring's uneven and meager coverage of the African countries in which we are particularly interested—the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe—makes it very difficult for us to predict what policy directions their governments are likely to follow in the future.[8]

III. The Case of Zimbabwe

BBC Monitoring's approach to gathering information about Zimbabwe offers some useful insights about the thinking of its executives and the needs of the ministries and agencies they serve. Responding to MIGS' complaints of inadequate coverage for Zimbabwe, especially in these days of political repression, systematic rape of women living in townships perceived as hostile to Mugabe, cholera epidemics caused by the breakdown of municipal utilities, and vigorous Zimbabwe government jamming using transmitters and techniques imported from China to blot out the broadcasts of independent radio stations like the Zimbabwe Forum of Voice of America, the Voice of the People, SW Radio Africa, and Studio 7 of the Voice of America, BBC Monitoring pointed us to weekly media update reports compiled by the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ), based in Harare.[9] Supported by donor agencies from Norway, the Netherlands, and the United States, as well as Article 19, the Open Society Initiative for

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Dr. Hansjoerg Biener, "Zimbabwe," Radio for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights. Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://www.evrel.ewf.uni-erlangen.de/pesc/peaceradio-ZBW.html; Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe, "Zimbabwe: Media Update Report, 3-9 November 08," Harare, 15 November 2008.

Southern Africa, and the Communications Assistance Foundation, MMPZ rarely provides transcripts of Government of Zimbabwe news broadcasts. It produces reports featuring content analyses of the major media in Zimbabwe and contrasting the one-sided news stories in the government media with the more balanced treatment of the same news that is broadcast by private stations.[10] Missing from the reports issued by the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe is the raw data that we need, the transcripts of government news broadcasts that would provide evidence on which MIGS could base its own projections of future government policies.

IV. What is the United States Doing?

Transcripts of government radio and television broadcasts are just one part of "open source information (OSINT) produced by newspapers, journals, radio and television, and the Internet."[11] The United States Intelligence Community "defines open source information as that information that is publicly available material that anyone can lawfully obtain by request, purchase, or observation."[12] Following the recommendations of several government commissions and the Congress of the United States, on 1 November 2005 the Director of National Intelligence established a National Open Source Center (NOSC) under the management of the Central Intelligence Agency. The NOSC incorporated and improved on the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), an information gathering agency which had monitored, transcribed, and translated foreign government radio news broadcasts for the US government and private researchers since

[10] See AfDevInfo, Organisation Record. Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://www.afdevinfo.com/htmlreports/org/org_63385.html

[11] Richard A. Best, Jr. and Alfred Cumming, "Open Source Intelligence (OSINT): Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, December 5, 2007, Order Code RL34270, pp. 5-6. Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/intel/RL34270.pdf

[12] Ibid., citing Intelligence Community Directive Number 301 and P.L. 109-163, Sec. 931.

February 1941.[13] NOSC and BBC Monitoring will undoubtedly continue for many years to come to implement the high level of cooperation and division of responsibilities which has characterized British and American information gathering since the Second World War. Faced by threatened budget cuts, BBC Monitoring and FBIS are increasingly hiring contractors to assist them in the work of monitoring, transcribing and translating. FBIS employs 700 independent contractors[14], while BBC Monitoring employed 234 independent contractors contributing 35% of transcribed items by the end of 2007-2008.[15]

While BBC Monitoring's transcripts of African and the Middle Eastern radio and TV broadcasts are available on-line to non-government researchers for an annual subscription fee of about $1,700, FBIS's transcripts can be accessed by non-government researchers through the World News Connection, a commercial service originally distributed by the National Technical Information Service of the US Department of Commerce. After purchasing access and distribution rights to the NTIS reports, the Thomson Corporation advertised the WNC as "the only news service that allows you to take advantage of the intelligence gathering experience of OSC."[16] In July 2008, WNC, now packaged as part of Dialog, was acquired by ProQuest, a major provider of information databases to business and university libraries.[17] ProQuest databases are often

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[13] Ibid. p. 12.

[14] Wikipedia, "Foreign Broadcast Information Service." Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_Broadcast_Information_Service

[15] BBC Monitoring, *A Year in Review*, p. 9.

[16] Dialog. Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://wnc.dialog.com/

[17] "ProQuest Acquires Dialog," 1 July 2008. Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://www.proquest.com/en-US/aboutus/pressroom/08/20080701.shtml

quite expensive and are likely to be beyond the means of most university based researchers unless their libraries are able to purchase an annual subscription.

Any notion that the American NOSC and private distributors have significantly improved on BBC Monitoring's coverage of African government radio and television news broadcasts is dispelled by checking a list of the countries and sources available through Dialog. The government news broadcasts of seven African countries are offered in the Dialog database: Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, and Zambia. Coverage of Zimbabwe is limited to two newspapers, the *Financial Gazette* and *The Herald*.[18] On a continent where radio is still the chief purveyor of news to the majority of the population, such coverage is inadequate.

V. Goals for the Future: Citizens Observatories with Universal Access to Open Source Information

We have identified two important issues for the future in this brief review: 1) Insufficient monitoring and translation of African government radio and television news broadcasts by agencies of the British and American governments; and 2) obstructed access for non-government researchers to translated African government news broadcasts. A recent report from the Congressional Research Service which reviews the George W. Bush administration's approach to open source intelligence points out that "Congress also has broader options."[19] "A more radical approach," it observes:

> would be to establish an Open Source Agency completely outside the Intelligence Community (in addition to the existing Open Source Center). The goal would be

[18] "Sources Included in World News Connection (WNC), Dialog File 985, April 2003. Accessed on 4 December 2008 at: http://support.dialog.com/searchaids/dialog/pdf/file985_sources.pdf

[19] CRS, "Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)," p. 20.

> to provide open source information not just to intelligence analysts but to all elements of the Federal Government including congressional committees. Such an entity could also be established in the Defense Department (outside of intelligence agencies) with special responsibilities for supporting multilateral operations involving a number of countries some of whom might not be intelligence partners of the United States.[20]

The utility of such an open source agency for multilateral cooperation leading to the enforcement of Responsibility to Protect principles is obvious. Not only governments would benefit from such an innovation. Academic research institutes focused on prevention of crimes against humanity and genocide would also gain improved access to valuable data, especially if the coverage of African states was broadened and deepened. As the CRS study points out,

> Proponents of this plan argue that open source information is essential for virtually all governmental functions but that the explosion of available information has not been matched by concerted efforts to acquire and analyze it. The goal would be to establish a center of expertise for the entire Federal Government **and to make available to the public free universal access to all unclassified information acquired through this initiative**.[21] (Emphasis added by FC)

These are goals whose attainment would, in my view, seriously enhance our ability to predict, identify, and document harmful action and intent in Africa and elsewhere. Citizens' research observatories with information resources to rival those of governments

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[20] Ibid., 20-21.

[21] Ibid., 20-21.

would introduce thoughtful and well informed dialogue about early warning signs when large-scale crimes against humanity could still be prevented. Together with the work of responsible government agencies and international institutions, such observatories would help to discourage government decision-makers from postponing decisions and delaying actions essential to applying the principles of the Responsibility to Protect report in a timely and effective manner

Other Essays by the Author on the Role of the Media in Genocide

Chalk, Frank. "Radio Broadcasting in the Incitement and Interdiction of Gross Violations of Human Rights, including Genocide," a chapter contributed to the book, Genocide:

Essays toward Understanding, Early Warning and Prevention, Roger Smith, editor, pp. 85-103. Williamsburg, Virginia: Association of Genocide Scholars, Department of Government, College of William and Mary, 1999.

_____, "Hate Radio in Rwanda," a chapter contributed to the book, The Path of A Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire, Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, eds., pp. 93-107 and Bibliography. New York and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999.

_____, "The Media in the Incitement and Interdiction of Genocide," Option Paper, published as the lead article on "The Roots of Genocide" in *Proceedings of the Stockholm International Forum on Preventing Genocide: Threats and Responsibilities* (Stockholm: Government of Sweden, 2004), pp. 147-148.
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_____, "Intervening to Prevent Genocidal Violence: The Role of the Media," a chapter in *The Media in the Rwanda Genocide*, Allan Thompson, editor.
Ottawa, International Development Research Center, 2007. Available online at:
http://www.idrc.ca/rwandagenocide/